

What is claimed is:

1. A method for providing discounts for items in an automatic transaction machine comprising:

5 validating cash or card and a discount means having an associated discount value;

detecting a selection of an item or a group of items, each having a preset vending price; and

discounting the vending price of the item or group of items according to the discount value.

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2. The method of claim 1 further comprising:

processing the discount value as a phantom coin signal.

15 3. The method of claim 1 further comprising providing an item or service if the vending price is matched or exceeded.

4. The method of claim 3 further comprising:

terminating the vending operation before the item or the group of items is vended; and

20 returning a validated card but not the discount means.

5. The method of claim 3 further comprising:

terminating the vending operation before the item or

the group of items is vended; and
returning a validated card and the discount means.

6. The method of claim 1 further comprising:
5 terminating the vending operation before the item or
the group of items are vended; and
returning the validated cash or card, and cash
corresponding to the discount value.

10 7. The method of claim 1 further comprising validating
the discount means only during a pre-determined time period.

8. The method of claim 1 further comprising allowing
vend items to be discounted by the discount value for a preset
15 period of time upon validating the discount means.

9. The method of claim 1 further comprising varying
the discount value according to the selected item or group.

20 10. The method of claim 1 further comprising varying
the discount value according to a preset time period and the
selected item or group.

11. The method of claim 3 further comprising:
returning change for the total value of the validated
cash plus the discount value less the total vending price of
the selected item or group, or the total value of the validated
5 cash less the sum of the total vending price and the discount
value upon dispensing the item or group of items.

12. The method according to claim 1 further comprising:
rejecting and returning any additional discount means
10 after one discount means has been validated.

13. The method according to claim 1 further comprising:
accepting and validating a number of discount means each
with a discount value to give a cumulative discount per
15 transaction of the vend item selected.

14. The method according to claim 1 further comprising:
determining the discount value based on the selection
of the item or the group and the time.

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15. The method according to claim 1 further comprising
dispensing a discount token or coupon.

16. The method according to claim 15 further comprising:
dispensing the discount token or coupon only if no
discount means has been used to purchase the vend item.

5 17. The method according to claim 1 further comprising:
 waiting for additional deposit of cash or card or
 discount means if the total value of the validated cash or card
 is less than the total vending price of the selected item or
 group less the discount value.

10 18. The method according to claim 1 further comprising:
 waiting for additional deposit of cash or card or
 discount means if the total value of the validated cash or card
 and the discount value is less than the total vending price
15 of the selected item or group.

19. The method of claim 1 further comprising:
calculating the discount value as a fractional value
of the vending price of the selected item or group.

20 20. The method of claim 1 further comprising:
 validating the discount means by reading information
 off the discount means, the information containing the discount

value.

21. The method of claim 1 further comprising: reading information off the discount means and updating information 5 on the discount means during validation of the discount means, and returning the discount means for reuse.

22. The method of claim 21 further comprising reading the number of times the discount means was used to vend an item 10 or a group of items off the discount means; and updating the number of times the discount means is used to vend an item of a group of items on the discount means.

23. The method of claim 22 providing a bonus if the 15 number of times the discount means was used equals a preset number.

24. The method of claim 23 wherein the bonus is a fractional value of the vending price and greater than the 20 discount value.

25. An article comprising a computer-readable medium that stores computer-executable instructions for causing a

computer system to:

validate cash or card and a discount means having an associated discount value;

detect a selection of an item or a group of items, each 5 having a preset vending price; and

discount the vending price of the item or group of items according to the discount value of the discount means.,

26. The article according to claim 25 further including 10 instructions for causing the computer system to:

converting the discount value into a phantom coin signal.

27. The article according to claim 25 further including 15 instructions for causing the computer system to:

terminate vending an item, and
return the validated cash or card but not the discount means.

28. The article according to claim 25 further including 20 instructions for causing the computer system to:

terminate vending an item, and
return the validated cash or card and the discount means.

29. The article according to claim 25 further including instructions for causing the computer system to:

terminate vending an item, and

5 return the validated cash or card, and cash corresponding to the discount value.

30. The article according to claim 25 further including instructions for causing the computer system to:

10 validate the discount means only during a pre-determined time period.

31. The article according to claim 25 further including instructions for causing the computer system to:

15 allow vend items to be discounted by the discount value for a preset period of time upon validating the discount means.

32. The article according to claim 25 further including instructions for causing the computer system to:

20 vary the discount value according to the selected item or group.

33. The article according to claim 25 further including

instructions for causing the computer system to:

vary the discount value according to a preset time and
the selected item or group.

5 34. The article according to claim 25 further including
instructions for causing the computer system to:

return change for the total value of the validated cash
plus the discount value less the total vending price of the
selected item or group, or the total value of the validated
10 cash less the sum of the total vending price and the discount
value upon dispensing the item or group of items.

35. The article according to claim 25 further including
instructions for causing the computer system to:

15 reject and return any additional discount means after
one discount means has been validated.

36. The article according to claim 25 further including
instructions for causing the computer system to:

20 accept and validate a number of discount means each with
a discount value to give a cumulative discount per transaction
of the vend item selected.

37. The article according to claim 25 further including instructions for causing the computer system to:

determine the discount value by considering the selection of the item or group and the time.

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38. The article according to claim 25 further including instructions for causing the computer system to:

dispense a discount token or coupon.

10 39. The article according to claim 38 further including instructions for causing the computer system to:

dispense the discount token or coupon only if no discount means has been used to purchase the vend item.

15 40. The article according to claim 25 further including instructions for causing the computer system to:

wait for additional deposit of cash or card or discount means and for selection of another item or group if the total value of the validated cash or card is less than the total vending price of the selected vend item or group less the discount value.

20 41. The article according to claim 25 further including instructions for causing the computer system to:

wait for additional deposit of cash or card or discount means and for selection of another item or group if the total value of the validated cash or card and the discount value is less than the total vending price of the selected vend item 5 or group.

42. The article according to claim 25 further including instructions for causing the computer system to:

calculate the discount value as a fractional value of 10 the vending price of the selected item or group.

43. The article according to claim 25 further including instructions for causing the computer system to:

validate the discount means by reading information off 15 the discount means, the information containing the discount value.

44. The article according to claim 25 further including instructions for causing the computer system to:

20 read information off the discount means; and update information on the discount means during validation of the discount means; and return the discount means for reuse.

45. The article according to claim 25 further including instructions for causing the computer system to:

read the number of times the discount means was used
5 to vend an item or a group of items off the discount means;
and

update the number of times the discount means is used
to vend an item of a group of items on the discount means.

10 46. The article according to claim 45 further including instructions for causing the computer system to:

give a bonus if the number of times the discount means was used equals a preset number.

15 47. The article according to claim 46 further including instructions for causing the computer system to:

give the bonus at a fractional value of the vending price but greater than the discount value.

20 48. The article according to claim 45 further including instructions for causing the computer system to:

give the bonus equal to the vending price.

49. A discount device for an automatic vending machine comprising:

a validating means for validating a discount means having a discount value;

5 a coin mechanism connected to the validating means, for converting the discount value into a signal and processing a preset vending price of a vend item or group of vend items and the discount value; and

10 a control means connected to the coin mechanism, for receiving the signal from the coin mechanism and controlling the vending of the vend item or the group of vend items.

50. The device according to claim 49 wherein the signal of the discount value is a phantom coin signal.

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51. The device according to claim 49 further comprising a cash validating means for validating cash.

52. The device according to claim 49 further comprising
20 a card validating means for validating a card.

53. The device according to claim 49 wherein the, discount value is determined from the discount means.

54. The device according to claim 49 wherein the discount value has a fixed value.

5 55. The device according to claim 49 wherein the discount value depends on the vend item.

56. The device according to claim 49 wherein the discount value depends on the time of the day.

10 57. The device according to claim 49 wherein the discount value depends on the group of vend items.

58. The discount device according to claim 49 further
15 comprising:
a printing means for printing a coupon.

59 The discount device according to claim 49 wherein
the printer is configured to print a coupon if no discount means
20 is used to purchase the vend item.

60. The discount device according to claim 49 wherein
the printer is configured to print a coupon that has a discount

value greater than the discount value of the discount means used to purchase the vend item.

61. The device according to claim 51 wherein the
5 information of the validated cash, the discount means, the vending price and the discount value are evaluated by the coin mechanism to determine whether the total value of the cash exceeds or equals the vending price less the discount value of the discount means.

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62. The device according to claim 51 wherein the information of the validated cash, the discount means, the vending price and the discount value are evaluated by the control means to determine whether the total value of the cash exceeds
15 or equals the vending price less the discount value of the discount means.

63. A discount device for processing discounts on a vend item in a vending machine, causing to:

20 process a discount means having a discount value as a phantom coin signal,

discount the vend item according to the discount value associated with the phantom coin signal.

64. The discount device according to claim 63 wherein
a coin mechanism configured to receive cash and the discount
means processes the phantom coin signal to give a discount on
5 the vend item.

65. The discount device according to claim 63 wherein
a control means configured to control the vending of the vend
item processes the phantom coin signal to give a discount on
10 the vend item.

66. The discount device according to claim 63 wherein
the device is networked to a central system configured to track
15 and monitor information associated with the discount means.

67. The discount device according to claim 66 wherein
the information associated with the discount means is calculated
to produce the number of the discount means used, the type of
20 items purchased with the discount means, and the location of
the discount device.

68. The discount device according to claim 63 further

causing to:

dispense a free vend item after processing the discount means when a code is entered on a keypad connected to the discount device.

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69. The discount device according to claim 68 wherein the discount means is not returned after vending the free vend item.

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70. The discount device according to claim 63 wherein the discount means is returned after dispensing the vend item discounted according to the phantom coin signal.